

Projects of regional interest shared

BY STEVE BEGNOCHE, MANAGING EDITOR, *Ludington Daily News*, 6.23.15

Those attending the West Michigan Regional Prosperity Alliance steering committee meeting Monday in Ludington heard updates on plans to make the Port of Muskegon a regional hub, something the 13-county group identified as its top priority.

Erin Kuhn explained the process that is being used as Muskegon tries to determine a vision for the port as a multimodal logistic hub with access for shipping to domestic and global markets.

Its important for Muskegon, she noted, because of the impending closure of Consumers Energys B.C. Cobb coal power plant and the loss of jobs in April 2016 and the loss of more than 600,000 tons of coal that is now shipped into the port each year. Without the coal shipments, Muskegon will fall below the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers 1 million tons of cargo standard for dredging the harbor.

The goal is to try to encourage regional agricultural and manufacturing interests to look at shipping goods made or needed in the region through the Port of Muskegon, she said. The Port of Muskegon is looking at partnerships in Milwaukee and Cleveland that would allow access to both international and domestic markets for goods. Two studies about this will be released at forums this week in Muskegon, she said.

And while the entire plan may take time to come to fruition, she said some of that shipping could begin in the coming year.

Wheels are in motion and we likely will see ships moving out of Muskegon for foreign ports, she said.

John Weiss, chair of the steering committee, called the Muskegon effort a project of regional importance for all of West Michigan, not just Muskegon.

WATERSHED COLLABORATIVE

Several presenters update the committee on a move to bring the approximately 40 independent watershed groups active in the 13-county region together. Protecting water quality throughout the region and the water quality of the shared resources of Lake Michigan is one goal. Creating a regionwide watershed plan to seek sustainable funding for watershed groups with federally approved watershed plans instead of the current hodge podge approach is another goal.

This group sees a chance of partnering with the prosperity region to the north that shares the Lake Michigan shoreline on issues affecting Lake Michigan.

Wendy Oglivie, of Grand Valley MC, said water quality and water resources are part of the blue economy in the state.

The collaborative has its first meeting today at Grand Valley State University.

Wayne Andersen of the Pere Marquette and Big Sable rivers watershed attended Monday's session.

BROADBAND

Updates were given on efforts to increase broadband coverage throughout the region.

Mason County is in the data collection phase of creating its plan. Spence Riggs has been identified as the lead person for the effort.

Lake County has completed its action plan and is moving into education phases.

Oceana County is stalled and the effort needs to be rekindled, Tom Stephenson who along with Dan Manning is leading the regional effort said.

BADGER PARK?

Kathy Maclean told the history of how Harbor View Marina, a public-private partnership, came to be and pointed out features on the Ludington waterfront visible from the marina where the group was gathered.

One feature she noted was Waterfront Park, which she called a wonderful gathering place for the community. Weiss, who owns a home on the Buttersville Peninsula where a reception for the group was held following the meeting, followed Maclean's comments with a story of how when his grandchildren see the SS Badger heading to Ludington they ask to go down to Badger Park and watch it come in.

A park by any other name ...